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Materiality of Time: Phenomenology and its Place in Archaeology

Hourglass Dawns: *The Becoming of Time as Space, A Note on the Work of Agamben, Nancy and Jameson*

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Abstract

Time since Kant have troubled Continental philosophy right through to Husserl and past his project of Phenomenology expressed and thus terminated in the works of Heidegger and Derrida who have left traces of messianism, nihilism and apparitions of 'timeless' time. In the aftermath of Derrida, the analysis of time in Continental philosophy has taken different paths which possess political agendas depending on their tradition. The fundamental kind of the treatment of time deals with a post-phenomenological approach insomuch as reducing experiences of time to lived existences of things which deny the possibility of conceiving of a metaphysical account of time.

As a PhD German candidate at Durham University, my doctoral work concerns the concept of totality from Kant to Derrida (2016-2019) supervised by Nicholas Saul. I read English Literature and History at the University of Leicester (2012-2015). I worked with Ian Harris on an dissertation on Locke and the State of Nature which consolidated my interests in philosophy of history and literature. After my bachelor, I undertook a Masters of Letters in Intellectual History at the University of St Andrews (2015-2016) working with Caroline Humfress on essays concerning Derrida, Badiou's and Nietzsche's Saint Paul, and a masters thesis on Foucault in the College de France lectures.

The following reflections are concerned with time.

What is time?

If time finds its meaning in eternity, then it must be understood starting from eternity. The point of departure and path of this inquiry are thereby indicated in advance: from eternity to time. This way of posing the question is fine, provided that we have the aforementioned point of departure at our disposal, that is, that we are acquainted with eternity and adequately understand it. If eternity were something other than the empty state of perpetual being, the dei if God were eternity, then the way of contemplating time initially suggested would necessarily remain in a state of perplexity so long as it knows nothing of God, and fails to understand the inquiry concerning him. If our access to God is faith and if involving oneself with eternity is nothing other than this faith, then philosophy will never have eternity and, accordingly, we will never be able to employ eternity methodologically as a possible respect in which to discuss time.

Philosophy can never be relieved of this perplexity. The theologian, then, is the legitimate expert on time; and if recollection serves us correctly, theology is concerned with time in several respects.

– Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (1924)¹

The question of time, according to Heidegger in this short excerpt from an earlier lecture prior to his *Sein und Zeit* is a profoundly theological question that in his view, precedes the realm of philosophy itself. In this paper, I shall attempt to firstly give an account of Kant and time in order to address the fundamental basis in modern philosophy to which the preceding accounts of temporality have shifted then beginning with Heidegger. Then I shall address some of the contemporary post-phenomenological accounts in Agamben and Nancy, and suggest, that these accounts of 'timeless time' fall prey to a dialectical critique originating in Adorno and Horkheimer against Bergson's apparent linear account of time guised as 'duration', and carried out in Jameson's account of time in contemporary capitalism in relation to archaeology and new sites of time becoming space itself, and in addition the fundamental linkage between time and the human being. The initial sketches are merely an allegory for the individual presentations of an account of time and its correlate the human

¹ Heidegger Martin, *The Concept of Time, The First Draft of Being and Time*, Continuum, (London, 1992)

subject, in order to prepare a groundwork for a more detailed analysis of Agamben, Nancy and Jameson. Thus, this paper is a tracing of the dialectic of time and its transformations in its various conceptions throughout time itself. And as a result, I hope an allegory may be constructed out of the presence of the texts and thinkers I represent in order think through time beyond them.

For Kant, space and time are merely products of intuition and are not objectively in the world, they are *apriori*, subjective conditions on the possibility of experience.² The mind structures the manifold sensory information that is given to the senses, and organises them around the faculty of sensibility. The two primary parts of the 'transcendental aesthetic' of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) are space and time to which the mind organises the phenomena into, this is the faculty of intuition. The mind then therefore constitutes and arranges the sensory data into experiences of so called objects, to which our intuitions within the possibilities of experience of space and time, make this experience of objects when the understanding structures them according to the transcendental deduction of the categories, being unity, plurality, and totality, the latter being the subject of my doctoral work from Kant to Derrida. These categories are the fundamental basis by which any sort of human, cognitive activity is made possible and any understanding of objects is made possible at all. However, space and time as intuitions figure different values and statuses in Kant's Critique, therefore, time is 'the form of all intuitions', and space is the form of the 'outer' intuitions. In conclusion, Kant's philosophy proved revolutionary and problematic simultaneously for his contemporaries and the generations of literary scholars and philosophers of the next generations. Time in Kant, was a major point of contention for Hegel, and without delving too heavily into Hegel's critique³ of Kant's ahistorical account of space and time, Hegel's emphasis on the progression of history as the development of freedom into a futurity of the negative or what is not yet, is precisely the process of this development of time, from the Greek statues of sensuousness to the Romantic modes of irony and self-reflexivity as a higher expression of the Absolute.

Next, we shall turn to Husserl briefly then to Heidegger⁴ to synthesize a view of the post-Heideggerean philosophers Agamben, Nancy and Jameson. Put succinctly, Hegel temporalised Kant's atemporal account, and Heidegger will insert the 'Husserlian structures of consciousness' into time. Within the question of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl seeks a kind of 'timeless truths' within the 'Heracleitean flux' of the pure ego, much like to Kant's transcendental ego, Husserl calls himself a 'transcendental idealist'. The presentations of intentional objects are 'immanent to consciousness', insomuch that the different presentations do not occur all at once, they come in a flow or succession, thus the continuation of these phenomenological presentations is like the continuously 'flowing time'. The supposed differentiated moments of time to each other is the immanence of time itself. Thus, the time synthesis is a passive synthesis insomuch as it is not something we do consciously but time confronts us as a complete or finished object of intentional awareness. The most basic awareness for Husserl is time in that the time flowing past the pure ego, is an 'internal time consciousness'. Time is in this primordial sense, is for Husserl the most general

2 Altman C. Matthew (ed.), 25 The Critical Legal and Political Philosophy Immanuel Kant, H. Williams in The Palgrave Kant Handbook, (London, 2017), p. 570

3 Hammer Espen, 4 Hegel's temporalization of the absolute in Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 71

4 Ibid., 8 Heidegger on boredom and modernity, p. 161

eidōs or essence as part of the 'eidetic reduction'. In Heidegger, the conception of time has 'remained' since Kant a formal conception, and we they did not yet possess a 'phenomenological conception of the phenomenon of time itself, nor in Husserl either. In Heidegger's conception of the the work of art, art is connected to truth, but not the timeless truth of Husserl's pure ego, Kant's transcendental subject nor Hegel's Absolute, but as a contingent truth open to the domain of futurity to come and not yet disclosed.

Now, we turn to a detour through Adorno and Horkheimer in their critiques of these accounts of time. For Adorno, Kant details the structures and ordering categories of the mind but not only is his account of the mind ahistorical and atemporal although constrained by time itself, he gives no reason of where these particular categories originate from and why. Adorno's answer in brief is that the 'struggle' for the assemblage of the mind itself from the sensory chaos is derived from Marx's concept of labour, in that what people perceive and how they perceive time for example is differentiated alongside their particular time, or temporality in which that particular subject finds herself in as a dialectical consequence. Therefore, Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique⁵ of these metaphysical accounts of time and phenomenological reductions of time are misguided in not differentiating their conceptions from the particular position in which they themselves occupy as they write about time, their space or position of their sphere determines or correlates to their conception of time. In essence, this transition to the tying together the analysis of how space determines time, and how time itself is conditioned by certain determinations of space, leads us into the work of Agamben, Nancy and Jameson.⁶

In the work of Agamben and Nancy a different account of time is constructed. For Agamben, inherited from Benjamin and Derrida in a form of messianism, he claims that the future is provided by the homo sacer in the 'ambivalence of the sacred', interpollating between the something we are not and what we might become as a result projected into a timeless future.⁷ For Agamben, language is temporality, the scission between the semiotic and semantic when a subject enunciates within a historical context, is itself, time. Furthermore, in Agamben time gains a spatial dimension in the sovereign's universal declaration of a state of exception in which the exception as rule becomes the status of contemporary human life.⁸ Thus, for Agamben violence is not just the problem and activity of representation itself but the concept-formation of the subject which is involved in enunciation itself which is inevitably linked to temporality as a result. Therefore, Agamben's time is caught between messianic time which renders impossible life into a law, and also deconstruction's deferral of signification.⁹ The state of exception as suggested before takes on a spatial dimension because in order for time to be universally the same as the state of exception, it must occupy all spaces and all times and spaces as a result. In Jean-Luc Nancy, his conception of time revolves predominantly around Heidegger's conception of *Mitsein* and how the world community since globalization demands universal, global, ontological responsibility.¹⁰ Therefore, time in Nancy is relegated to the

5 Ibid., 9 A modernist critique of postmodern temporality, p. 188

6 Ibid., p. 189

7 Colebrook Claire and Jason Maxwell, Agamben, Polity Press, (Cambridge, 2016), p.156

8 Ibid., 2 Sovereignty, State of Exception, and Biopolitics, p. 48

9 Ibid., Introduction: Agamben and the Present, p. 4

10 Ibid., 6 Power Beyond Recognition, p. 139

core of Western philosophy in regards to a lost *Gemeinschaft* of small-scale communities which ever since its Greek origins have postulated this perfect community to which we have fell out of and live in an isolated, frozen time of isolated, selfish individuals. This nostalgic messianism of longing for a time beyond our own which we were exiled from, Nancy claims we should be suspicious of and rightly so, but this messianic return to this longing in fact sustains the very situation timelessness we find ourselves in. Additionally, Nancy like Agamben sees humanitarian intervention in the globalized world as a form of latent sovereignty in which the sovereign moves across space and time in order to sublimate heterogeneities of temporalities into a semblance of order. Now in regards to Jameson, a fundamental differentiation is made in regards to the practice of cognitive mapping and how time has become space in contemporary capitalism, and in this sense, history is no longer possible. Jameson's analysis of time takes the form of his continuing critique of postmodernism which poses itself as a heterogeneous type of temporality.¹¹ Thus, the postmodern space or how time is now made into space takes the form of a spatial logic of late capitalism, in which an 'alarming disjunction' between our perception of our bodies and the immanent situation of ourselves, and the constructed environment on the other side. Essentially, Jameson's view of postmodern time which is the contemporary mode of time in late capitalism, is how time has become timeless and become concrete in space in that it is has infected 'enclaves' or once sacred parts of the body, nature and the unconscious are two examples Jameson gives and turned them into spaces of 'chaotic immediacy' and sites of colonization.¹² In addition to this new cognitive mapping of how postmodern time, or space has colonized our bodies as human beings is the death of narrative in which narratives are in fact, no longer told, dubious and fragmented almost to an oblivion. Thus time today is a postmodern hyperspace in which even archaeology and archaeological sites, museums and galleries are almost a kind of 'mausoleum' for Jameson in light of the globalized development of multinational capitalism, in that, preserving certain objects of ancient history are a product of a certain pre-multinational capitalism nostalgia or a longing for a time that once was, or never was but we imagine its innocent Edenic time nonetheless. This criticism of modernity and technology in this regard mirrors Heidegger's critique and his calling to a pre-Platonic conception of time, in that the space of multinational capital is 'unrepresentable' and our individual bodies and human beings can no longer represent themselves as such. Jameson's solution to this dilemma of time as space in contemporary capitalism is 'cognitive mapping' as a political aesthetic, which generally and succinctly means, the ability to form a dialectic to our capacity of 'immediate perception' of time to the totality of a global context in which we can imagine futurities without regressing to former conceptions of time which the postmodern era sustains, and without doing the opposite but to the same ends, of reproducing a supposedly 'new' form of time which inevitably represents the false utopianism which postmodernism itself also sustains as a result. Thus, for Jameson the last frontier of capitalist exploitation is space itself in all its forms of the human body, the globe and even inter-planetary ventures into hitherto unexplored spaces.

In conclusion, let us put historicity, and the possibility of repetition, to the test. Aristotle often used to emphasize in his writings that the most important thing is the correct, original assurance in a matter, emerging from a familiarity with the matter itself, the assurance of the appropriate manner of dealing with the matter. In order to speak in keeping with the

11 I Hammer Espen, 4 Hegel's temporalization of the absolute in Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 190

12 Ibid., p. 191

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ontological character of our theme here, we must talk temporally about time. We wish to repeat temporally the question of what time is. Time is the 'how'. If we inquire into what time is, then one may not cling prematurely to an answer (time is such and such), for this always means a 'what'. Let us disregard the answer and repeat the question. What happened to the question? It has transformed itself. What is time? became the question: Who is time? More closely: are we ourselves time? Or closer still: am I my time? In this way I come closest to it, and if I understand the question correctly, it is then taken completely seriously. Such questioning is thus the most appropriate manner of access to and of dealing with time as in each case mine. Then Dasein would be: being questionable.¹³

In conclusion, I perceive that I have compressed some substance into both a short space of time, and in short amount of time covered a lot of space, but I hope I have made clear Jameson's critique of post-phenomenological accounts of time in attempting to understand the new spaces of time.

¹³ Heidegger Martin, *The Concept of Time, The First Draft of Being and Time*, Continuum, (London, 1992)